

# Multi-Modal Transportation Plan

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## Email Comments from Alan Wickman

*September 1, 2003*

I wanted to make some bicycling-related comments for your committee's consideration. I noted that your last meeting produced the following list of bicycling-related "problems" or "concerns" for Lincoln:

- (1) Bicycle safety downtown
- (2) Lack of respect for (pedestrians and) bicyclists.
- (3) No bike racks on city busses.
- (4) Trail connections are lacking; there are not reasonable street routes to connect local trails.
- (5) Trails appear to be for recreational use only.
- (6) Security concerns were expressed about trails -- don't like trails "back in the bushes."
- (7) There is a lack of long term funding for trails other than vehicle tax dollars.
- (8) There aren't bike trails going downtown.
- (9) No bike lockers.
- (10) The city is not adequately promoting the use of alternative transportation. (This comment was not solely bicycle-related, but it is very relevant to bicycling. The allegation is that the city doesn't adequately promote public transportation; it doesn't adequately promote walking and it doesn't adequately promote bicycling. I'm not sure that this is completely relevant with regard to the busses, but I think that it is certainly relevant with regard to walking and bicycling.)
- (11) Safety, education & attitudes were listed, but almost nothing was said to really flesh out what this was really supposed to mean.

I would like to comment on these using the numbering in the above list.

- (1) I'm not against responsible ideas to improve cyclist safety, but I feel that this concern also demonstrates a lack of experience with riding downtown. I ride on downtown streets on most days of the year, and I don't find it to be particularly hazardous. I have been informed by a friend of mine that examined bicycling accidents in 2002 that there were 10 bicycle-related accidents downtown. Of these, 8 involved bicyclists on sidewalks (which indicates a lack of cycling know-how and it is also against city ordinance) and the other 2 accidents involved bicyclists in improper positions in turning lanes. So the record hardly supports that downtown Lincoln is unsafe for bicyclists. Yes, there is room for improvement, but I think that your group makes a mistake if it starts with the premise that riding in downtown Lincoln (on the streets) is inherently unsafe.

- (2) Every bicyclist with lots of miles ridden can tell you tales of motorists that were "jerks" (my term for them). But I would definitely disagree with the characterization that lack of respect of bicyclists by motorists is a characteristic found by anything more than a very small minority of the motorists in Lincoln. In all honesty, I have witnessed poor riding behavior by cyclists around automobiles much more frequently than I have witnessed poor behavior by motorists around bicyclists.
- (3) I definitely agree with this suggestion. I think that bike racks on city busses, in combination with active pursuit of other ideas, will help increase cycling as well as ridership on busses.
- (4) I strongly support extensions of Lincoln's greenway-like trail system. Some of these paths are simply wonderful -- they are a real asset to the community that improve property values and community life. But I want to put this in perspective: there are a lot of reasons beyond transportation utility to support development of greenway-like trails. But let's not go too far -- these trails are not and should not be the only safe way that pedestrians and bicyclists can get around town.
- (5) I think that my views of trails are captured pretty well in my comments in response to item (4). I think that there are lots of reasons to have trails other than for transportation. But my observation of many of the same cyclists on the trails around the same times of the day leads me to believe that the trails are used by plenty of commuters as part of their routes. I know that I use a trail part of the way on my commute to work.
- (6) I seriously question how relevant this concern is for persons using trails for transportation purposes. A person taking a stroll at 9:00 p.m. may think of this, but I don't think that it is probably much of a concern for someone that is commuting. I know that I would disagree with those that don't want trails "back in the bushes." I definitely appreciate greenway-type trails. I'd like as many of them as possible "back in the bushes."
- (7) I don't know if this comment came from a person following Congressional TE debate, and I also wasn't really sure what the point of the comment was, but it is clearly easier from a funding standpoint to develop good bicycle facilities when areas are first being developed than to go in after the fact. I would certainly like Lincoln to pursue a strategy of coordinated planning for greenway -- type developments, including multi-use paths, with all new areas of development. The tougher thing, as many have referenced, is finding ways to tie things together in the areas of the city that have already been developed. And, back to the point, if something needs to be done to assure funding, then I certainly support exploring that.
- (8) I'd like to see a few improvements here, too, but I am also aware of a few very substantial projects already in the works to improve trails near the downtown area. The Antelope Valley project is obviously the biggest one, but there are also some improvements planned coming in from the SW of the downtown area. In large part, however, when I see suggestions of this nature without any mention of bike lanes and without any mention of cyclist education, I come back to the point that the group and the city is a little too trails-centric in its consideration of bicycling as a means of transportation.
- (9) Bike lockers would be a real plus. I ride a nice bicycle to work, but that is only because I have a place inside my office area where I can store my bicycle. There are errands that I simply wouldn't run with my bicycle because I don't like the thought of leaving it chained up to an outdoor bicycle rack. I lost the key to a U-Lock once and used a battery powered tool to cut the

shackle. It demonstrated for me that locking a bike to a rack just isn't very secure. Bike lockers would be a real plus, but it would also be advantageous if employers attempted to provide inside parking for employees' bicycles in places where no one other than other employees have access.

- (10) I felt like hugging the person that said this, even though it wasn't just a bicycling-specific comment and even though it didn't get into details. I feel that this is an important part of promoting bicycling especially, although it probably also has application for other modes of alternate transportation.
- (11) This is a statement that needs to be fleshed out.

In terms of "goals" or "opportunities," the only thing that I noted was a desire that local multi-use trails connect with each other. That was it.

In terms of suggestions for your committee, my overarching bicycling-related suggestion would be to look to ways that you can get more people riding bicycles for transportation (which will necessarily involve getting more people to ride bicycles for recreation as well). Improvements to the existing trails system would certainly be a large part of this. When the city expands, plans should be in place for greenway-type multi-use trails within every section and with connections between them. This is much more than a transportation suggestion, however -- it is a "quality of life" suggestion. I don't think that we could justify multi-use paths merely for their bicycle transportation value. Rather, they enrich the lives of the people in the area and this "enrichment" is reflected in higher property values.

Not all bicycling transportation can be done on multi-use trails and/or on very low volume residential streets. People that work downtown will need to ride a bicycle downtown and people that work in many other locations will need to be able to follow much the same route as some of our arterial streets. This brings me to the subject of bike lanes or at least streets that are specifically designed with bicycling in mind. I'm really not completely sold on bike lanes, because they can cause problems as well as solve them, but I believe that at least a few bike lanes around town would go a long ways towards changing the mindset of local bicyclists that they need to stay on trails. I believe that this mindset is to blame for the excessive amount of sidewalk riding that we see in this community.

On the subject of reducing the amount of sidewalk riding, which I believe should be primarily addressed through education of some sort, I believe that we need to be careful as we plan our multi-use trail system around the city. Some of the city's trails are very desirable as a means of bicycling transportation because they aren't what I call "glorified sidewalks." Rather, they are paved trails through greenway areas that offer the user the opportunity to ride a longer distance without as many street intersections to contend with. The Rock Island Trail lets me go almost 3 miles from Essex Street in Southwood to 27th and Capitol Parkway with only three street intersections in-between. That is wonderful when it can be provided. What I feel much less enthusiastic about, however, are "trails" that are nothing more than glorified sidewalks. Look at the "trail" running along Superior Street or the "trail" running along Old Cheney. These are just wide sidewalks, and they involve accident hazards at intersections that are higher than those faced by bicyclists riding down the street. They certainly don't provide the strong "quality of life" improvements that a greenway-type multi-use path does, which means that they have got to be justified because they provide a safer connection than can be provided in some other fashion. I bring this up because I don't believe that this is an approach to be followed for a number of possible situations, especially when there are a lot of intersecting streets.

I think that bike lanes would be safer than "glorified sidewalks" when there are a lot of intersecting streets, because most of the bicycle accidents occurring in the city of Lincoln occur when a person riding

on the sidewalk crosses or enters the street. They don't occur to people that are riding in the street.

Other more bite-size suggestions that I have for you include:

- (a) There are state and local traffic laws related to bicycling that could be fixed up somewhat. I don't see this as a high priority for your group, but I mention it for sake of completeness.
- (b) It has already been mentioned that it is important to promote bicycling and to educate bicyclists. Just look at all of the people riding on sidewalks. While a need for education applies for all age groups, I think that a special effort needs to be made with regard to our junior high and high school age youth. There is a crushing tendency for young teens to view bicycles as toys that they outgrow, even prior to getting their drivers license, and certainly aren't something that they would be caught doing after they get their drivers license. I don't have a full understanding of teen psychology (does anyone?), but I think that these youth view bicycles as toys because that is the way that almost everyone else treats them. I think that a concerted effort involving both parents but especially the schools (that do extremely little in this area right now) needs to be made so that young people don't completely stop riding bicycles when they hit their mid-teens.
- (c) For the various section roads around Lincoln, that start as county gravel roads, then get paved and then get widened, I suggest that a modest shoulder be placed on all of these as soon as they are paved. Check out Pine Lake Road between 40th and 56th for a good example of what I'm talking about. Hard core bicyclists head out of town and ride on the 8-foot shoulders on Highway 77, Highway 34 and Highway 2. These highways probably fall outside the scope of your study, but it would also be helpful if the paved roads near the periphery of Lincoln had modest shoulders, both for purposes of general vehicular safety as well as a plus for cyclists. These would allow cyclists to get to areas where plenty of people already live, but that simply aren't as built up and may not be entirely within the city limits yet.

I wish you luck. You have a tough task ahead of you.